



# In Touch South India

## Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai



October — November 2007

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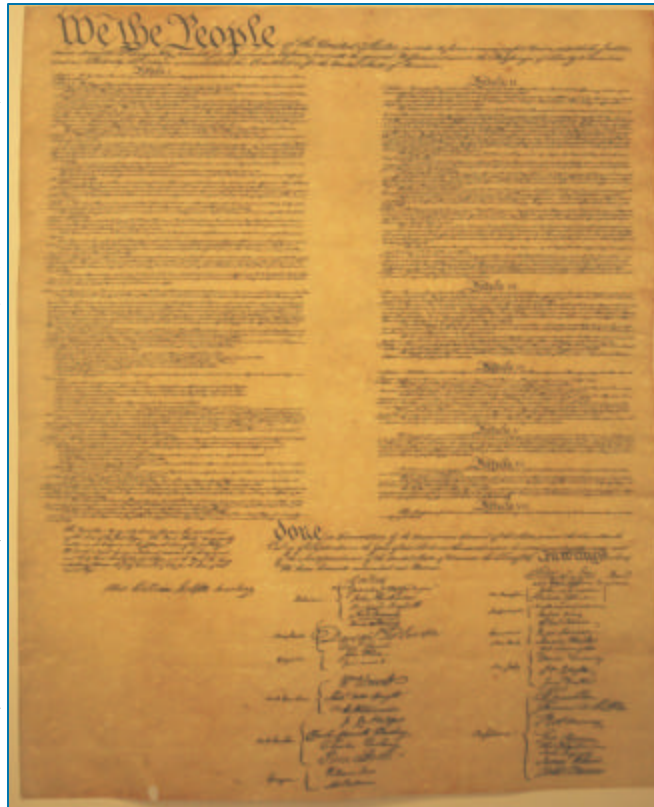
<http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>

# Constitution Day

On September 17, 1787, after four months of intense debate and several draft documents, the delegates to the Constitutional Convention met for the last time and signed the Constitution of the United States. The 55 'framers' of the Constitution included the American giants Washington, Franklin, Madison and Hamilton. Together they sought to create "a more perfect Union," one that balanced the need for a strong central government that could raise revenues and regulate commerce with the heartfelt desire on the part of many framers to protect state and local interests.

The Constitution was printed on six pages and could be read in less than half an hour. A model of brevity, it was a blueprint for a new type of government and has been amended a mere 27 times in 220 years. Before ratifying the Constitution, several states called for a "bill of rights" to protect against a return to tyranny. The first ten amendments to the Constitution, ratified in 1791, constitute the Bill of Rights. They restrict the powers of the national govern-

ment and, in the words of Richard Henry Lee, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, guarantee "those essential rights of mankind without which liberty cannot exist."



An original copy of the Constitution is preserved in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

The Consulate General-Chennai celebrated the anniversary of the Constitution of the United States at the residence of Consul General David Hopper. At the ceremony, Mr. Hopper compared the Declaration of Independence of 1776 with the Constitution, drafted eleven years later and after war with England. The Declaration, Mr. Hopper said, "answers the question of why we sought independence as well as what are the principles of the new nation. The Constitution addresses the question of how we organize ourselves to fulfill those principles, to be independent, free and united."

The American Constitution, as the world's oldest written constitution in force, has served as a model for other constitutions around the world, including India's. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking at a joint session of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate on October 13, 1949,

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Get In Touch

#### Consulate main web link:

<http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>

#### Other links:

<http://americanlibrary.in.library.net>

<http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov>

<http://www.usaep.org>

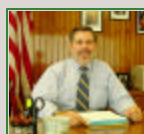
<http://buyusa.gov/india>

#### Consulate Phone Number:

044-2857-4000

#### Consulate Fax Number:

044-2811-2020



As noted above, on September 17 the Consulate General observed Constitution Day, which celebrates the signing of the American Constitution. Although September 17 is not a public holiday in the U.S., it is an occasion well worth remembering as it celebrates one of America's most important documents. It occurs to me that at this time of year Americans observe a number of public holidays and other events worth noting and probably little known in India. Every year the first Monday in September marks Labor Day, a day off for the "working man" and the unofficial end to summer. October 12 is Columbus Day, the day when Columbus, who of course was seeking India, arrived in the "New World." October 31 is Halloween, when American children "trick or treat" for candies and sweets. November 11, observed in many countries as Remembrance Day or Armistice Day, is a public holiday in the U.S. known as Veterans Day to honor all Americans who have provided military service. The last occasion in November is my favorite, Thanksgiving Day, which we celebrate on the fourth Thursday of the month by gathering with families and friends to give thanks for all of the blessings we enjoy. As an American living in India, I enjoy learning about this diverse culture through its festivals and holidays. I hope "In Touch" readers find our American occasions similarly interesting.

**-David T. Hopper, Consul General**

noted that the drafters of the Constitution of the Republic of India were “greatly influenced” by the U.S. Constitution. He told the members of the U.S. Congress: “Like you, we shall be a republic based on the federal principle, which is an outstanding contribution of the founders of this great Republic. In a vast country like India, as in this great Republic of the United States, it becomes necessary to have a delicate balance between central control and State autonomy. We have placed in the forefront of our Constitution those fundamental human rights to which all men who love liberty, equality and progress aspire -- the freedom of the individual, the equality of men and the rule of law.”

In spite of the vast differences between the United States and India in their history, political development and culture, the constitutional values of the two great democratic republics are remarkably similar. Indians in the late 1940s grappled with many of the same issues that confounded the framers of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. Indeed, some of these issues remain contentious ones in both countries and are the subject of Supreme Court rulings.

The American Constitution, like its Indian counterpart, is not a dusty old document stuck in a drawer somewhere, but a living, breathing “owner’s manual” to the republic. The U.S. Constitution is “the supreme Law of the land,” with which statutes, treaties and acts of the Executive Branch must comply. It is therefore the responsibility of all American citizens to know, respect and defend this landmark document that continues to guide the nation.

## Exchange Visitor Alumni Association

Founded in 1999 by alumni of U.S. Department of State exchange programs, the Exchange Visitor Alumni Association (EVAA) serves as a platform for former exchange visitors to network between themselves and to share the benefits of their exchange experience with the larger community.

For over 65 years, the U.S. State Department has invited Indians from various fields to visit the United States under different exchange programs to increase mutual understanding at the personal and professional level. Academics, government officials, NGO and business leaders, lawyers, politicians, environmentalists, artists, writers, journalists and students have participated in programs tailored to their areas of expertise and interest. Some of the most famous Indian exchange grantees are Indira Gandhi, Morarji Desai, A.B. Vajpayee, K.R. Narayanan and Farooq Abdullah.

Since 1980, nearly 600 people from South India have participated in such exchange programs, conferences and seminars. On returning to India, several participants expressed a desire to form an association that would continue their professional and personal links with the United States and at the same time promote and nurture Indo-U.S. relations.

The current President of EVAA is Mr. Sudhakar Reddy, a businessman and former journalist based in Hyderabad. For more information about EVAA, please contact [ChennaiPASPrograms@state.gov](mailto:ChennaiPASPrograms@state.gov).

## Positive Images



▲ Several young dancers from the Bharata Kalanjali Academy perform in the Consulate General auditorium on September 28. (See article on page 3.)



▲ Pegasus Players from Chicago receive a standing ovation at The Hindu/Metro Plus Theatre Festival on August 10.



▲ Consulate employees and spouse proudly show off one of the foundation holes they dug for a Habitat for Humanity project south of Chennai.



## Coimbatore Citizens "Experience America"

The people of Coimbatore got a glimpse of life in the United States during the Consulate General's "Experience America" exhibition September 24 to 26, 2007. Featuring book exhibits, documentary films, concerts, lectures, a roundtable discussion and digital video conference, the exhibition showcased the range of services, resources and programs provided by the Consulate General. Held in partnership with leading educational institutions and business associations in Coimbatore, the exhibition was visited and appreciated by a large number of citizens of Coimbatore, a city that is fast gaining importance as a major international investment destination as well as a center of higher learning in India.

Dr. Thiruvvasagam receives a memento from Mrs. Geetha Padmanabhan, Secretary, GDR Institutions.

In inaugurating the "Experience America" exhibition, Dr. G. Thiruvvasagam, Vice Chancellor of Bharathiar University, noted the growing strength of Indo-U.S. relations and appreciated the Consulate General's efforts in organizing an event that would benefit Coimbatore citizens, especially college and university students and professionals.

The Consulate General – Chennai deeply appreciates the generosity and support of Dr. GRD College of Science, PSG College of Arts and Science, Bharathiar University, PSG Institute of Management, Kongunadu Arts and Science College, Vinashilingam University and the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, all of which contributed to making "Experience America" a big success.



American violinist Preetha Narayanan in concert with percussionist Radhakrishnan at "Experience America".

## Consular Corner:

### Streamlined Procedure for Visa Renewals

For applicants seeking to renew previously issued visas to the United States, Consulate General - Chennai is now introducing a streamlined procedure. Normally, after pre-screening, applicants applying for a visa are first finger-scanned, and then wait in the consulate waiting area for a visa interview with an officer. Under the new procedure, the applicant will go in a special revalidation line. Most applicants will be finger-scanned and receive their visa within a week.

To be eligible, an applicant must have already been issued a visa in the same category of visa they are now applying, and be a resident of the Chennai Consular district. The previous visa must either be valid or have expired within the last 12 months. Applicants applying under this renewal category can receive appointments in under a week.

Applications for visas are made by first requesting an appointment through our courier service at <https://www.vfs-usa.co.in/Home.aspx>, or by calling 044-42316767.

### Bharata Kalanjali at the Consulate

Bharata Kalanjali, a group of wonderfully talented 12 to 18-year-old Bharatanatyam dancers, enthralled an audience of Consulate General employees during a September 28 performance in the Consulate auditorium. In addition to their classical Bharatanatyam repertoire, the young dancers performed folk dances from all over India. The performance was organized by the Consulate's Locally-Employed Staff Association. (See photo on page 2.)

The dancers had been trained by world-renowned gurus V.P. and Shanta Dhananjayan at their academy in Chennai. The group will visit the United States from October 26 to November 11 and give some 33 performances and workshops in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey. American audiences are in for a fantastic treat and will come to know a beautiful and, for them, exotic art form.

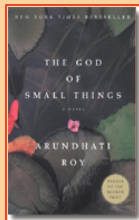
## What We Read

**Fresonke, Kristen L**  
*Vice Consul*

### *The God of Small Things*

by Arundhati Roy

Are unhappy families more interesting than happy ones? In this novel, they are. Betrayal, jealousy, sibling rivalry, forbidden love, Marxist ideology, pickle factories, and caste violence -- and that's just in the opening chapter. If you like Homer's "Iliad," you will see Roy's characters drawn from the epic scale; if you favor the domestic gothic, like Anne Rice or William Faulkner, you'll have your fill of family seaminess and kitchen-table cruelty. Visitors to Kerala will recognize its lush environs and its people's intense self-regard; if you haven't visited Kerala by now, this novel will inspire you to go.

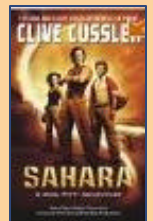


**Wildman, Michelle M**  
*Vice Consul*

### *Sahara*

by Clive Cussler

You may recognize the title from a movie starring and produced by Matthew McConaughey. The book's plot line involving toxic chemicals killing all life on earth, lost treasure and a cruel dictator combine to make it even more action packed than the movie. Subplots, like the search for a lost Confederate ironclad ship, provide the backdrop for harrowing twists and turns you never suspect, even if you have seen the movie. The author also makes a cameo appearance in his own book. This is one case in which I enjoyed the differences between screen and print.



## Meet Indu Sundaresen

The Consulate General invited Indian-American novelist Indu Sundaresan back to South India where she discussed the writer's trade and her own novels with enthusiastic audiences. Following are some questions we put to her:



Q: After graduating from Ethiraj College in Chennai with a degree in Economics, what made you decide to become a full-time writer?

It wasn't until I had finished my graduate degrees (in economics and operations research at the University of Delaware) that I decided to become a writer. I don't actually remember wanting to be a writer when I was young, and yet, when I made the decision to write a novel it just seemed like the right thing to do! I wrote two novels before I wrote *The Twentieth Wife* and it took me five long years of marketing before the book was published.

Q: Why are all of your novels -- like *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses* which are set in Mughal India and *The Splendor of Silence* which takes place in 1942 -- set in the past?

I live away from India now, and have done so for a great many years. The U.S. is home, a home that has nurtured and supported my decision to be a writer and sustained me in my writing career. But I miss India, the country of my birth and my early years. Writing about the past keeps me connected with India, so I live (figuratively) in both the U.S. and in India.

Q: How and why did you choose Nur Jahan as the protagonist for your first two novels -- *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses*?

I came upon Nur Jahan's story quite by chance. While I was at graduate school in the U.S., one winter evening, when it had turned dark in mid afternoon, I was particularly homesick and missing family and friends in India. So I took the bus to the university library, typed "India" in the subject keyword in the library's computer, and went to the section that housed books on India. I returned home that evening with an armload full of books on India--one of those was a book on Mughal harems. That began my fascination with Nur Jahan, her life, the sheer amount of power she exercised at a time when women lived behind the veil, behind harem walls, not meant to be seen and rarely meant to be heard.

Q: How much of what you wrote about Nur Jahan was fact and how much was fiction?

In the initial drafts of the novels, there was a lot of fact which I culled out as I revised and the storyline took shape. I tried, still, to be as factually accurate as possible. The novels, after all the revisions and rewriting, are still about 70 percent or so accurate--where I tweak history, I tell the reader something about it in an afterword section in both novels, and my reasoning for taking the storyline where I took it.

## ... and Wes Robertson



Mr. Wesley Robertson assumed the position of Information Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Chennai on August 3, 2007.

Mr. Robertson is from California and joined the Foreign Service in 2002. Before coming to Chennai he served as the Deputy Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, where he was responsible for the press function of the Public Affairs Section as well as the mission's International Visitors Program. Mr. Robertson also served as the Consular Section Chief for the U.S. Embassy in Muscat, Oman.

Mr. Robertson holds a Master's degree in National Security Studies from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Washington, DC, and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

Prior to joining the Foreign Service Mr. Robertson worked as an analyst focusing on defense trends and technology issues in Washington, DC, and in the corporate office of a real estate and investment company in the San Francisco Bay Area.

An avowed "foodie," Mr. Robertson's greatest ambition is to sample the entire array of South Indian cuisine over the next three years. He is married to Paula Robertson and has four children.

## American Library Travels to Mangalore

S.D.M. Law College in Mangalore hosted a traveling exhibition of the American Library on August 21-23, 2007. More than 3,000 people visited the exhibition, which featured a book display, a PowerPoint presentation on other library resources, poster shows on biodiversity and intellectual property, and the screening of "A Closer Walk," a powerful documentary film on the struggle against the global AIDS pandemic.

At the inauguration, Dr. K.M. Kaveriappa, Vice Chancellor of the University of Mangalore, urged students to make use of the rich offerings of the American Library. U.S. Consul for Public Affairs Frederick Kaplan said: "Although the American Library is based in Chennai, its collection -- books, periodicals, online databases, CDs, DVDs, etc. -- is available to everyone in South India who enrolls as a member. If you cannot come to Chennai, we will send you what you need either electronically or through the post."